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Tomkins, Calvin

A New Jersey forecast

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[1908]

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A New Jersey Forecast

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ADDRESS

Delivered at Good Roads Convention, Atlantic City, N. J.,
September 26, 1908.

By CALVIN TOMKINS, President,
New Jersey Waterways Association.

The topography of the State of New Jersey and the geographical relation of this State to the other States of the Union make the consideration of its future development peculiarly interesting at this time. The northeastern counties of the State, contiguous to New York Harbor and the Hudson River, constitute in effect the western part of the greatest ocean port of North America. The southeastern counties on the left bank of the Delaware River, near Philadelphia, constitute the easterly portion of the Atlantic port second in importance to New York, and the cities along the line of the Delaware and Raritan Canal, between Trenton and Perth Amboy, will become the connecting industrial links between these two great commercial centres. The highland district of New Jersey is situated in that part of the State to the north of the canal, and the rich agricultural plains and salubrious pine lands lie to the south. It is inevitable that the territory in the vicinity of these two great cities

and along the line of the canal, must in its development assume an industrial character while the other sections of the State, including its admirable seacoast, should be devoted to agriculture, residence and recreation. It does not necessarily follow that because these opportunities exist they will be made use of by the people of the State. The successful utilization by the State of its component parts depends upon foresight in planning for their uses in advance of needs.

How shall the people of the State provide for this impending intense urban industrial development, and at the same time conserve rural and marine beauty, and convenience for residence and recreation? That is the problem which will become more clearly defined as the development proceeds. In my judgment, the answer is to be sought in the intelligent development of the transportation routes of the State, including its highways, railways, canals and harbors. Transportation in its largest sense is the determining factor, both in the growth of the city and of the country; that is, transportation of food, raw materials and passengers along the lines of least resistance to and from natural object-points. Any plan which does not facilitate this normal movement of people and commodities will naturally tend to unbalance an ineffective social organization. Transportation for supplying industrial centres should be the cheapest and most effective possible if our cities are to grow in competition with the other great cities of the world and, it should be remembered, that this is as beneficial to the farmer, the lumberman, the fisherman and the miner as it is to the continually increasing number of people who dwell in cities. It is also to be borne in mind that the free interchange of *commodities* within the city, and the rapid and cheap transportation of *people* within the city, and also to and from the city and its suburbs, is of equally great importance if we are to avoid the evils of undesirable congestion.

The industrial cities of New Jersey already enjoy, through the instrumentality of the railroads of the United States, most advantageous connections with the rest of the country, and by steamship with the world at large. One after another the important trunk lines leading from the Mississippi Valley have

been diverted through the State to Jersey City, so that at the present time the great Atlantic railway terminal of the United States is now located along its northeastern shore. Railway facilities already provided serve but to indicate the future commercial supremacy the State may expect to attain if its natural opportunities are properly opened up for exploitation by its land and water highways.

Except for the pre-eminent superiority of New York Harbor, the southern part of the State should ultimately expect to secure as advantageous railway terminals and connections as are now found at the north; and the United States Government should be urged with equal persistence to provide for the deep water navigation of both the Delaware River and New York Harbor. If the National Government shall ever enter upon a system of inland waterways improvements, one of the most desirable and productive fields for expenditure will be to enlarge and deepen the Delaware and Raritan Canal. The State should not wait for National action in this matter, but should itself proceed to plan for the improvement of this most important State waterway connecting its two great ports. Such a connection would do much to develop both of the great New Jersey cities located at either end of the canal, each of which will become a great State city in itself and also a growing part of an Inter-State city. The enlarged canal would also be of the greatest benefit to the State in developing its manufactures. Railway freight rates between the two terminal cities would by this means be regulated in a salutary manner and agricultural products, coal, lumber, building materials and these raw materials for manufacture which are found in New Jersey, could be most advantageously transported, and coincidentally the railroads would be relieved of the comparatively unprofitable business of moving this heavy and bulky freight which is already congesting their Atlantic terminal lines.

At a very moderate cost, considering its length, the State can develop an inland waterway along its seacoast 117 miles in length from Cape May to Gay Head. This would be principally used for pleasure travel and for the transportation of farm produce, building materials and supplies for the great seashore population of the Summer months. For the greater part

of the distance the channel already exists—and its completion would materially tend to the development of the ocean front of New Jersey, which is one of the greatest assets of the State.

In addition to waterway and railway improvements, the opening up of the State of New Jersey is dependent very largely upon an adequate system of highways. The leading European countries undertook highway development before the advent of railroads. In our own country at the time we were entering upon a comprehensive scheme of state and national highways, railway construction intervened and absorbed the capital and enterprise of the country to such an extent that until very recently our highways have been unduly neglected. In proportion to its population and area the State of New Jersey is not behind other states in road building, but the time has now arrived, when, in order to take advantage of the peculiar opportunities above referred to, the State should enter upon a comprehensive and far reaching system of highway improvements. As a community the State cannot completely control its railway and waterway policy but it can organize and extend its highway system to meet the demands of the immediate present and the not distant future. The highways are the feeders for the railways and it frequently happens that the cost of delivering freight to the railways exceeds the cost of transportation over them. No class suffers more from this than the farmers. European highways are superior to ours as regards alignment, gradients, construction and maintenance and their more advantageous ratio of tractive power to load must be witnessed to be fully appreciated. The social influence of good roads in agricultural districts is not to be forgotten. The tendency to drift away from the farm to the city, even in the State of New Jersey, is more pronounced than the tendency to return to it from the city. This urban drift, here as elsewhere, can be counteracted in no more effective way than by improving local communication. The isolated farm offers few attractions to counteract the gregarious tendencies of the times. Human society and a chance for something more than a bare living must at least be made possible on the farm. The city always supplies the first need and the farm can be made to supply both needs with greater profit to the State and to the individual than can the city.

The highway system of the State should be laid out with due regard to those of adjacent States as well as its own. In growing cities provision should be made for the ultimate widening of avenues which in the first instance will only serve suburban communities. The advent of the automobile and motor-truck are imposing new conditions both upon the uses and construction of our highways—these novel conditions are becoming permanent and must be provided for by careful observation and experiment.

Several of the counties of New Jersey have entered upon a most commendable policy of park extension and it is to be hoped that, following the example already set, additional counties will set aside for this purpose swampy lands and barren ridge lands comparatively unavailable for other purposes and which can now be secured cheaply. Palisades Park should be connected by way of the Hudson County Boulevard with the Hudson County Park, now being laid out on the east bank of the Hackensack River; and this in turn should be connected with the Essex County parks by means of an attractive driveway along the Meadows Plank Road, which is about to be improved. At present there exists no decent highway approach leading from the Hudson River westward into the beautiful interior of the State. If the natural beauties of the State are to be disclosed it is essential that provision should be made for this now when the plans for the improvement of the Meadows roads and bridges are receiving attention. A beautiful and extensive park can and should ultimately be laid out at the Navesink Highlands and this opportunity should not be neglected before local increase of population makes its attainment difficult.

The exceptional facilities afforded by the Harbor of New York and the level grades leading from it through the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley are the causes for the phenomenal growth of the Port of New York. Doubtless within the lives of men now living the coalescing communities in the State of New York and the State of New Jersey surrounding this wonderful harbor will in the aggregate constitute the greatest local urban population of the world. The port in reality consists of three groups of cities separated by wide, deep and rapidly running streams. At the

centre, on Manhattan Island, and extending into Westchester County lies the old City of New York. Beyond the East River lie the cities of Long Island, and to the westward extended within the limits of a wide circle from the harbor, lie the New Jersey cities. The organization of these three urban groups into one great economic unit has been interfered with by the intervening bodies of water. The tunnels now built under the Hudson and East Rivers, together with the bridges over the latter estuary will afford the opportunity for normal radial expansion, and henceforth we may expect to see the Port of New York develop more regularly along lines extending from the centre to the circumference of a constantly widening circle of population, while the irregular, congested and sporadic growth of past years will become less and less apparent. The influence of this new, portentous change is only beginning to be appreciated and New Jersey will doubtless be the greatest beneficiary for the reason that it has heretofore participated least in the urban growth and consequently affords the most attractive field for enterprise. The consolidation of the several New York State cities into the great City of New York has broken down the inertia of parochial prejudices, substituted a better general comprehension of community needs, and provided a far better governmental organization for meeting these needs. That part of the Port of New York lying within the State of New Jersey, so far as social and economic relations are concerned, is an integral part of the great city around the harbor, but as a consequence of the State line it will always be separated politically. The cities and towns of northern New Jersey are at present separate entities and what they lack in political coherence and organization must be supplied by an intelligent and charitable public spirit, assisted, possibly, by the influence and authority of the State itself.

While enjoying many equal natural advantages with that section east of the Hudson River, these northern New Jersey counties are favored with one inestimable advantage over New York, in that the general railway system of the United States here finds its eastern tidewater terminal. Along the westerly shore of the Hudson River and Staten Island Kills and in the Hackensack and Passaic Valleys there will ultimately be

established the sea and land freightage and warehouse terminals of the port of New York, together with the manufacturing adjuncts which necessarily accompany them. The advantageous use of these cheap low-lying lands should be anticipated by the State which should plan for the future organization and use of the waterfront in connection with the back lands of the tidal valleys. Failure to do this now, will necessitate a most harassing and expensive reorganization subsequently. At no point along the Atlantic seaboard, from Montreal to New Orleans, is there to be found such a meeting place for the exchange of land and water traffic, or for the development of the immense manufacturing industries which necessarily follow in the train of transportation advantages. The great dock excavations of Antwerp and Liverpool are indicative of what may be accomplished on the Newark-Hackensack meadows and Jersey flats under still more favorable conditions. The cheap surrounding lands as far as the foot-hills are available for manufacturing sites and care should be taken to provide for the future connection of each such possible site with the general terminal facilities, so that raw materials may be sent in and manufactured products sent out as cheaply and efficiently as possible. The present expensive system of lighterage and cartage about Manhattan and Brooklyn, while it can be bettered in many respects, imposes a fatal handicap upon the industrial development of those less fortunate parts of the port.

It is important that the industrial development of the New Jersey low lands should proceed coincidentally with the residential development of its higher adjacent land. To accomplish this it is necessary that quick and cheap transportation between the low-lying manufacturing districts and the higher residential districts should be anticipated in order to avoid the disadvantages of a proletariat congestion of population such as is now menacing parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Cheap and rapid local passenger transportation can only be attained through a high degree of State control exercised over private transportation corporations. Decent living conditions and cheap transportation are interdependent factors of urban civilization.

The questions of sewerage, river pollution, water supply, forest preservation, provision for park reservations with connecting parkways and sites for the public institutions of the State are inter-related and bound up together and should be so considered in planning for the future. As in England, with increasing of population it will be found necessary to purify the sewerage before discharging it into the streams. It will be found economical to combine forest preservation with State and county park systems; and water supply reservations, as in Massachusetts, with both. Why should not the location of the State's penal and eleemosynary institutions also be considered in this same connection?

One of the greatest attractions which the State possesses is the natural rural beauty of so many of its counties. The value of natural scenery is to be carefully taken into consideration as a very practical State asset, and one which is frequently depressed by the unnecessary ugliness attending suburban and especially industrial evolution. This is a very real danger to be feared and guarded against in the near future. Rural England is the most beautiful example of nature, assisted by intelligent design; but even there, in many localities, where intense industrial activities have been imposed upon rural communities the result has been most discouraging. The proximity of the great cities of New York and Philadelphia, with their ever-spreading industrial life, undoubtedly menace the charms which make the State of New Jersey so attractive. For the very reason that a large part of New Jersey is especially suited for suburban homes it is peculiarly important that the unnecessary and depressing influences of industrialism should be here minimized as far as possible. There will inevitably come about a competition of localities for population and those communities which maintain a decent and artistic environment are certain to be sought for residence in preference to those which follow a different policy.

The increase of the suburban and industrial population of the State will henceforth be so rapid, as a consequence of its exceptional opportunities that it cannot, like other States, afford to base its policy of development on experience slowly acquired

with the influx of population. The people of the State must plan and act now or submit to circumstances rather than direct them. The Philistines are certainly upon New Jersey, and the alternative conditions which confront its people are either a vulgar embarrassment of riches which will mar its beauty and retard its commercial advancement, or a great and remarkable civic opportunity for the exercise of public spirit.

New York City has not as yet been aroused to the impending competition of New Jersey for its population. That city is and for some years will be embarrassed by lack of adequate local transportation facilities. Long neglect in this matter, coupled with a protracted conflict which must ensue between the interests of the city and the private interests of existing transportation companies, will hold back the proper development of that part of the Port situated in the State of New York. This arrested development will for a time afford New Jersey the initial opportunity to obtain her start in the contest for supremacy between the two parts of the Port of New York—or New Jersey, call it as you will—which are separated by the waters of the Hudson.

A comprehensive development plan which shall take into consideration the matters briefly touched upon above and others necessary to the development of the growth of the community is of the greatest importance at this time. The Interurban Committee of the Newark Board of Trade—Mr. J. Cotton Dana, chairman—in its report made in December, 1906, sets forth in a general way some salient features of such a plan, and I commend that report to your careful consideration. It is suggestive in its nature and intended to be so since the problems considered are too large and important for more than superficial consideration in such a document.

A comprehensive plan for State development, if provided in advance of actual needs, will have the tendency to avoid the clash of antagonisms which always accompanies interference of public improvements with private interests already established. Such a plan should be laid down in advance of improvements made by private enterprise so that these may supplement and not interfere with public improvements. I do not know that

any State has entered upon so broad and comprehensive a consideration of its public improvements as that here outlined, but conditions are peculiar in New Jersey. The State is small and the general features of its policy are, I think, comparatively simple. Situated as it is between both and a part of each of the two great Atlantic portals of North America and including the eastern tidewater terminal of the railway system of the country, its residential and industrial development will necessarily proceed with accelerating speed, especially since the water barrier separating it from the City of New York has been eliminated.

The policy of the State should not be restrictive—under our laws this is neither practicable nor desirable—but rather formative by giving direction to local development through a comprehensive provisional plan of growth, which shall endeavor to secure for the several localities of the State the facilities which will best subserve the natural uses of each. By this means factories and homes will not become disadvantageously associated. Public and private improvements will be co-ordinated, vexatious and expensive reorganization prevented, and finally the separate private and corporate enterprises of the State will be harnessed to the task of developing its natural resources without spoiling future opportunities for extensions and continued growth. Provision for such a comprehensive development plan fortified by a sound public opinion will not permit temporary and adventitious conditions to change a wise continuous policy of development.

I think the general policy of the State might be summed up briefly as follows:

First—To conserve for residential purposes the attractions and conveniences of those localities not best adapted for commerce and manufactures.

Second—To organize the waterfronts and low-lying back lands in the vicinity of New York and Philadelphia and along the line of the Delaware and Raritan Canal—so that by co-ordinating railroad, steamship and canal facilities with the development of manufactures, the greatest advantage can be secured from the unique opportunities with which the State is favored.

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